

# Strategic Research for Business Gateway - Report -



***Presented to:***

*Business Gateway PMO &  
Touchstone Consulting*



***Presented by:***

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# **1. Background and Objectives**



# Background

- Business Gateway coordinates across multiple federal agencies to improve the interactions between business and government, including:
  - Providing a business portal (business.gov)
  - Helping businesses understand and comply with laws and regulations
  - Maintaining a single portal for government forms (forms.gov)
  - Reducing information burdens on business (i.e., data harmonization)
  - Helping business find and leverage government resources
- Business Gateway is intended to serve all business communities, from small to large, from start-up to maturity to exit, and all sectors including non-profit institutions with business functions.
- A number of initiatives have already been launched, and are continually being improved.



# Objectives

- Research was conducted to clarify the role of Business Gateway by answering the following questions:
  - What is the target market for Business Gateway?
  - What are the boundaries for what it can/should accomplish?
  - How do businesses currently interact with government, and what are the opportunities for improving the interaction?
  - What do users and potential users expect from Business Gateway?
  - What do users and potential users think of the concept, content, features, functionality and usability of key areas, including – business.gov, forms.gov, business laws, and COMPASS?
  - What should be the short and long term priorities for making Business Gateway more responsive?
  - How does Business Gateway impact success of its users?
  - Who do users feel Business Gateway is intended to serve?
  - Will businesses use Business Gateway in the future?



## 2. Methodology



# Overview

- This phase of research relied on qualitative methods because...
  - There is a need to clarify the issues with direct feedback from stakeholders
  - The services under development are complex, requiring a less structured, more interactive evaluation
- Rockbridge, under contract to Touchstone Consulting, recommended and implemented:
  - Workshops with internal agency stakeholders
  - In-person focus groups with potential Business Gateway users
  - In-depth interviews with opinion leaders in organizations that influence potential users



# Stakeholder Workshops

- Prior to talking to businesses, stakeholder workshops were conducted with internal stakeholders.
- The purpose was to define the information objectives for the research.
  - The workshops also identified opportunities, challenges and constraints from the agency perspective, as well as internal perceptions of customer needs.
- One workshop was conducted with the Business Gateway Project Management Office team, and another was conducted with Business Gateway Advisory Group and Work Group members (comprising partner agency representatives).
- Each workshop lasted 2 hours.





# Focus Groups

## *Overview*

- A focus group is an open-ended, interactive discussion with a panel of 8 – 10 members of the target population.
- Rockbridge arranged 7 focus groups in 4 cities.
  - The groups were segmented by size, sector and profession to ensure a broad coverage of market segments, based on stakeholder workshops (see next page for sample design).
- Respondents were screened to ensure they had internet access and interacted with government as part of their job.
- Each session was professionally facilitated and lasted two hours.
  - The topic guide was pre-tested with a group of MBA students at the R. H. Smith School of Business, College Park, MD.
- All focus groups were video/audio-taped and transcribed.
- Respondents were given the opportunity to continue offering feedback to Business Gateway, and many expressed an interest in doing so.



# Focus Groups

## *Sampling Plan*

Population	Description	Market	Description
Financial Managers	Financial, tax responsibilities in medium/large companies	NYC	Large Metro area, presence of large companies, state is strong in e-government
Compliance Mgrs	Compliance/regulatory responsibilities, e.g., securities, intellectual property, legal		
Execs of Mid-Size Companies	Owners or senior managers in mid-sized companies	DC (Md Suburbs)	Large Metro area, presence of large companies and non-profits, state is average in e-government
Execs of Non-Profits	Associations, higher education, healthcare		
New/Emerging Businesses	Planning to start a business or newly established small businesses	Charles-ton, SC	Small Metro area, state is below average in e-government
Small Businesses	Owners, senior managers of established/mature small businesses	Portland, OR	Medium-sized Metro area, state is average in e-government
Human Resource Managers	Human resource/payroll responsibilities		



# Focus Groups

## *Topics Covered*

- Discussions were unstructured and open-ended, but were organized around the following topics:
  - Interactions with government today, and satisfaction thereof
  - Awareness, expectations and priorities for Business Gateway (without seeing any sites)
  - Guided tours and impressions of *business.gov*, *forms.gov*, *business laws*, SBPRA Compliance Assistance resources, and *COMPASS*
    - Sites were accessed in real-time and projected for users to view as group.
  - General reactions and intent to visit



# Opinion Leader Interviews

- Interviews were conducted with associations that represent industries, professions and special business communities.
- The purpose was to learn:
  - Issues businesses face in complying with laws/regulations
  - Member needs from Business Gateway
  - Perceptions of the current initiative, and the direction it should take
  - The role of associations in supporting Business Gateway
- Associations were selected to ensure a mix of industries, professions, communities, and key external stakeholders; specific organizations were selected based on large memberships or being leaders in their sector/profession (see next slide for sample overview).
- Interviewed individuals specialize in government affairs or e-government.
- This phase is still in process.



# Opinion Leader Interviews

## *Sampling Plan*

Segment	Organization
<b>Trade/Industry Associations</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>-National Association of Manufacturers</li> <li>-National Restaurant Association</li> <li>-Illinois Retail Merchants Association</li> <li>-American Farm Bureau Federation*</li> </ul>
<b>Professional Associations (professions that interact with government)</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>-American Association of Society Executives</li> <li>-Society for Human Resource Management (2 interviews)</li> <li>-Colorado Society of CPAs</li> </ul>
<b>Business Communities</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>-U.S. Chamber of Commerce</li> <li>-National Federation of Independent Businesses</li> <li>-Greater Kansas City Chamber of Commerce</li> </ul>
<b>Business Gateway Stakeholders</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>-Association of Small Business Development Centers</li> <li>-SCORE</li> </ul>

\* In process of scheduling an interview.

-Rockbridge is also in process of scheduling interviews with organizations specializing in minority and women-owned businesses.



# Limitations of the Research

- ➔ This research is qualitative in nature and has certain limitations:
  - Based on small convenience samples
  - Data is unstructured
  - Results are not statistically projectable to the larger population
- ➔ In various places, results have been tallied to highlight the direction of group consensus, but these tallies should not be viewed as representative of all businesses.
- ➔ This phase is instrumental in identifying the key issues for Business Gateway, and will inform future quantitative research, from which conclusions of a more projectable nature can be drawn.



### **3. Summary**



## 3. Summary

### Internal Perspectives

- Internal stakeholders involved in implementing Business Gateway are struggling with the scope of the initiative, particularly regarding who its audiences should be.
  - Can Business Gateway serve all size businesses, or should it focus on a niche such as small businesses?
  - How does it overlap with or complement other government sites? Private industry resources?
  - Is it relevant for non-profits? (It can address some of their needs, while other needs may be unique to the non-profit sector)
  - They believe this uncertainty will be reflected in low satisfaction with the sites.
- Internal stakeholders are optimistic about the future of how business and government will interact.





### **3. Summary**

## **Interactions with Government**

- Businesses spend a lot of time complying with laws and regulations and worrying about “what they do not know.”
- Businesses anticipate increasing regulatory burdens tempered only somewhat by the benefits of e-government.
- Of utmost concern for businesses is how to comply with laws and regulations.
- Businesses also spend a lot of time filling out government forms and want more efficient ways to locate and submit them electronically.
- Businesses want to minimize their relationship with government, and are not as interested in being nurtured by government.



### 3. Summary

## Who is Business Gateway For?

- There are major differences in the relationship with government across organizations, based on the kind of user
- The following groups have the **greatest need** for Business Gateway:
  - Entrepreneurs and owners of new businesses
  - Owners of established/mature small businesses
  - Managers in mid-sized or large companies with a wide range of government-facing responsibilities (e.g., HR generalist, CFO)
  - Non-profits—There is clearly a need for a portal to help non-profits with regulations and compliance issues that are common across businesses and non-profit organizations, but the brand “business.gov” may pose a challenge in reaching this group.
- The following group is a **lesser priority** for Business Gateway:
  - Specialists in large companies—Have the least need for a general government resource such as Business Gateway. They individuals have established relationships with agencies and might best be served by dedicated initiatives within the agencies they work with (e.g., patent office, SEC, IRS).



### 3. Summary

## What Businesses Want from Business Gateway

Focus group participants identified the issues below as top expectations from Business Gateway:

- **Personal contact.** Businesses hope Business Gateway can help them locate and interact more effectively with the right government employees for compliance issues.
- **Plain language compliance assistance.** A major concern of businesses and expectation of Business Gateway is help with compliance, in “plain language,” and on issues relevant to them that they are unaware of.
- **Issue-based searches.** Businesses see a lot of value in an integrated portal that helps them search and locate government information around problems and issues they face (rather than around agencies and regulations).
- **Searchable, fill-able, file-able forms.** Another key expectation is the ability to electronically find, fill, and file for all levels of government—federal, state, and local.



### 3. Summary Going Forward

- It is important to note that the **concepts are appealing**, but they create expectations that are currently not being delivered on.
- In addition, there have been **successes to date**:
  - The sites have an attractive “look and feel.”
  - Many of the broader topic areas are on target, and certain audiences feel they will get a lot of value.
- **Key priorities** for Business Gateway include the following:
  - Segment users in order to prioritize and position
  - Provide easier access to the right government employees
  - Focus on providing compliance assistance
  - Improve search capabilities around issue-based searches
  - Improve ability to locate and submit forms electronically
  - Enhance usability with features such as personalization/customization to deal with the plethora of business/user types and needs
  - Establish a quality control process for content



## **4. Internal Stakeholder Perspective**



## 4. Internal Stakeholders Environment for Business Gateway

- Internal stakeholders identified a number of trends favoring initiatives like Business Gateway, including:
  - President's agenda to reduce the burden of government, against a backdrop of increasing complexity of regulations
  - Increasing use of technology by businesses
  - Heightened expectations from e-services in the private sector, and expectations of a “competitive spirit” from government
  - Funding and cost pressures within government
  - A move towards integration and standardization across agencies
  - A need for a consistent presence by government that spans agencies



## **4. Internal Stakeholders**

### **Future of Business/Government Relations**

- Stakeholders are optimistic about the future of the business and government relationship, foreseeing:
  - Fuller integration of communication and delivery of services across all levels of government (“one-stop shopping), as well as a single “face” for communicating with government
  - Greater integration of state and federal functions
  - Increasing partnership between business and government
  - Increased use of electronic models for submitting forms and making payments
- A factor that may hold back e-government is an increasing concern about privacy and security among business.



## 4. Internal Stakeholders

### Current Situation for Business Gateway

- A paramount concern among stakeholders is what the niche for Business Gateway should be, since addressing the entire business sector is a broad mandate.
- Questions that need to be addressed include:
  - Can Business Gateway serve all size businesses, or should it focus on a niche such as small businesses?
  - How does it overlap with or complement other government sites? Private industry resources?
  - Is it relevant for non-profits? (It can address some of their needs, while other needs may be unique to the non-profit sector)
- A longer-term concern is the continuation of funding and support for e-government initiatives.





## 4. Internal Stakeholders

### What is Working in B2G Relationships

#### What is working

- Stakeholders believe that government is now taking a more customer-centric view in its relations with business
  - Agencies want to be more responsive, and some now have service level agreements with constituents
- Agency stakeholders believe that businesses trust government
- There is more collaboration between business and government, with third parties (i.e., associations) helping to foster communication

#### What is not Working

- Agency stakeholders perceive many pain points for businesses in the G2B relationship:
  - Businesses do not know what government has to offer (they see it only as a burden, not a helper), and do not know where to go for help
  - Businesses are overwhelmed by government forms and wonder why they are asked for so much information
  - Businesses have trouble complying with regulations, including knowing what they are
  - Interactions with government are too complex, and business has trouble working across multiple levels of government



## 4. Internal Stakeholders

### Business User Expectations

- Stakeholders believe businesses will expect the following from Business Gateway:
  - It should save them time and money, and help them make money
  - It should be comprehensive and offer “one stop shopping” for all the information businesses need
    - It should provide the right information in a “context” that helps businesses apply the information they access
  - It should give the user control, and rely on customization and personalization to narrow content and make it relevant
  - Business Gateway will need to learn the different ways users want to communicate and get help (e.g., FAQs, e-learning)
  - It should link local, state and federal agencies
  - For small and prospective businesses, it should offer all the information and tools needed for success
- Providing good service and building trust will be important to meeting expectations
  - Businesses think government “is out to get you,” and often turn to other sources for help before they turn to government



## 4. Internal Stakeholders

### Agency Expectations

- ➔ Stakeholders also identified expectations government agencies may have of Business Gateway, which include:
  - Promoting and creating standards across agencies, which ultimately saves time (there might be a need for service level agreements in cross-agency interactions)
  - In the short term, getting seed money for interesting new projects that support an agency's mission
  - Ability to retire some redundant sites, saving money and reducing workload pressures
  - Greater collaboration across agencies, which results in a different way of thinking and communicating, and leading to new and improved operating models (“best practices”)
  - Provide better service delivery, and create “smarter customers” for government by educating them on how to deal with government
  - Reduce the cost of service delivery



## **4. Internal Stakeholders**

### **Challenges in Implementing Business Gateway**

- Business Gateway will face many challenges in its implementation, which include internal hurdles as well as issues in positioning to the marketplace.
- A major internal challenge is garnering support from agencies by articulating a clear vision and value proposition for participating agencies and for the business community.
  - Business Gateway must reach out to a particularly broad group of agency stakeholders.
  - Agencies must willingly maintain content to keep it current.
  - Business Gateway has to make it easy for agencies to support the site, which includes overcoming technology hurdles.
- Another internal challenge will be to sustain support and resources in the long-term.



## 4. Internal Stakeholders Challenges (continued)

- Another internal challenge is a time constraint: there is pressure to bring Business Gateway to the market, but the value it delivers to businesses may be compromised if enhancements are rushed.
- In the long term, there will be a challenge to continually maintain the content and ensure it is current.
- From an external perspective, Business Gateway needs to define its audience within a large sector:
  - How large/broad should it be?
  - Should it be organized around vertical markets or horizontal business groupings? Are the needs of some industries already met?
- It will also be key for government to “speak in layman’s terms,” learning and using the language of business (e.g., “compliance assistance” may be a government term).



## 4. Internal Stakeholders

### Evaluation of Business Gateway

- Internal stakeholders do not believe Business Gateway will receive high ratings in its current form.
  - They believe users will rate it around a 5 on a 10 point scale (where 1 is poor and 10 is excellent).
- The main reason stakeholders expect a mediocre rating is that the intent of the site is not clear.
- One stakeholder group expressed the belief the site would be visited primarily by smaller businesses, and may also appeal to the first-time entrepreneur who seeks information on how to operate a business.
  - Stakeholders believe the site should be for every kind of business, including large enterprises.
  - It should also be useful to non-profits because they are also regulated and need information on compliance.



## 4. Internal Stakeholders Business Gateway Priorities

- The Business Gateway team faces a number of decisions as it moves forward, the most important being its scope.
- A common hope is that the sites can be made relevant to users through powerful personalization and search capabilities.
  - There is worry about whether the forms and compliance tools can adequately address all needs.
    - There are major differences between large businesses who rely on professionals versus a small business where the owners/managers must deal with compliance themselves.
  - Aside from the long-term strategy, decisions need to be made about what further enhancements and improvements are needed to make Business Gateway valuable.
  - Stakeholders are waiting for business community feedback to define the boundaries of the initiative.



## 4. Internal Stakeholders

### Transition to Data Gathering

- The feedback from the two stakeholder workshops were used to create a detailed list of information objectives.
- The objectives were incorporated into the data gathering agendas for the focus groups (Section 5) and interviews with Associations (Section 6).





## **5. Business Community Findings**

***Results of focus groups with  
business owners, professionals  
and non-profits***



## 5.1. Interactions with Government

- Businesses interact with government in a wide variety of transactions – it is impossible to catalogue every single transaction (but they appear to fall into some general categories, as shown on next slide)
- The vast majority of interactions have to do with meeting government requirements related to taxation or regulation
  - It is less common to contact government electronically or in-person for help in growing a business
- Most businesses interact with all levels of government
  - Businesses are aware of the differences between local, state and federal levels, and talk to employees and access websites for all three



## 5.1. Interactions with Government

### Types of Transactions/Activities

- Most common interactions are related to taxation, such as:
  - IRS business, including downloading and submitting forms, asking questions about compliance, regular filings, resolving disputes
  - Filing forms for tax exemption (non-profits)
  - Handling an array of local taxes, including property tax, income tax, and a plethora of local assessments
  - Payroll taxes
- Employee/labor issues are also common for HR managers, owners, and mid-level executives; these reach all levels of government, and cut across a range of federal agencies, and include:
  - Benefits issues, retirement plans and 401K
  - INS requirements (exacerbated by homeland security requirements)
  - Wage questions (e.g., what is the minimum wage?)
  - OSHA requirements
  - Contractor vs. employee status
  - Termination



## 5.1. Interactions with Government

### Types of Transactions/Activities (continued)

- Other types of transactions related to compliance include:
  - Obtaining and renewing business licenses and permits (could be at any level, but commonly local)
  - Patent, trademark, and copyright issues (common among in-house legal professionals)
  - Securities filings for publicly held companies to the SEC and state agencies
    - Regulators also request information, often on an ad hoc basis (an issue mentioned most by compliance and finance professionals in New York state)
  - Census forms/government data requirements for research needs
  - Dealing with local building codes, zoning requirements, etc.
    - An issue for architects, building firms
- Sometimes, businesses have needs to help them grow:
  - Government procurement/contracts
  - Accessing SBA-related programs, such as SBDCs



## 5.1. Interactions with Government Differences by Segment

- There are major differences in government interactions by the type of user, which affects how a resource like Business Gateway can respond to needs
  - **Small and emerging businesses** are more likely to need help with mentoring and start-up issues; in contrast, large businesses and established small enterprises find this kind of help to be basic
  - **Businesses with no employees** have minimal needs, and rely mostly on their accountants for help (the addition of employees to a business magnifies regulatory burdens)
  - **Financial managers** appear to have more generalized activities and access a wide range of government sources
  - **Executives in large companies**, particularly those whose compliance issues tend to have more focused needs and go to the same government source repeatedly; they tend to be comfortable with their relationships, and need agency-specific rather than cross-governmental coordination to help them
  - **Human resource managers** have complicated relationships with government and seek help navigating this relationship



## 5.1. Interactions with Government Differences by Segment (Continued)

- **Non-profits** have many of the same “business management” needs from government as their business counterparts.
  - For example, they interact with a variety of agencies for human resource issues.
  - They also have extended constituencies that broaden their needs, such as patients, students, and members.
  - They have special regulatory burdens, particularly as related to taxation, due to their non-profit status.
    - Example: the impact of IRS changes in valuation of automobiles, filing forms for tax exempt status
  - There is also a surprising degree of commonality across non-profits in the issues they face with government.



## 5.1. Interactions with Government

### How Businesses Interact

- Interactions with government are both “high tech” and “high touch”
- More and more needs are met via the web, including accessing information and forms, and conducting transactions – this is a boon to the more tech savvy users
  - While not all business people are computer savvy (there is a wide range), the use of computers and the internet is considered by many to be a basic requirement to be in business.
- However, it is often critical to speak to a live person in a government office who has knowledge and/or authority
  - The issue may be complex and require discussion (*“when putting out fires, you need to talk to someone”*).
  - Ultimately, the issue may need “sign off” from a government employee, so the business person needs to talk to this individual
- Professional intermediaries play a key role for all size businesses (e.g., attorneys, accounting firms, payroll services, consultants, and in-house service centers maintained by large corporations).
  - Some businesspeople like to do their own research to get smarter on issues before consulting professional intermediaries.



## 5.1. Interactions with Government Satisfaction in Dealing with Government

- Businesses are moderately satisfied in their dealings with government. The benefits of responsive government include less time spent by managers dealing with issues, and more importantly, minimizing the risks from failing to be in compliance with regulations (e.g., redoing work, getting fined, lawsuit, etc.)
  - *“having a stable government does make a difference...these rules and regulations do cost money”*
- Some things are working well in relations with government:
  - Government at all levels is embracing internet based modes of operating and making routine tasks simpler; it is easy to download and submit forms on the internet
    - *“Some things you fill out and get it over with”*
  - Certain government employees are very capable and helpful, particularly when the business knows who to deal with and there is a relationship
  - Businesses have noticed a trend towards greater responsiveness; for instance, some federal agencies have standards for getting back to a constituent in a certain time frame
    - *“people (at the IRS) are a little more helpful than years before...”*





## 5.1. Interactions with Government

### Problems in Dealing with Government

Problems in government relations include the following:

#### 1. Getting access to the right person

- Employees are often hard to find and inaccessible; there is a feeling government does not want to spend the money for staff
- There are limited office hours (exacerbated by time zone differences)
- Voice Menus cause a great deal of frustration, and federal agency employees may not be accessible through the VRU
- There is inconsistency in the quality of employees; it is important to know the right person who can resolve an issue

#### 2. Dealing with the large number of local and state entities when operations span more than one jurisdiction

- There is a lack of consistency in regulation, taxation, and enforcement
- There are also inconsistencies in organization (i.e., knowing which office handles a particular area)
- There is opportunity for a more consistent web presence across governments; every local/state government site requires new learning



## 5.1. Interactions with Government

### Problems in Dealing with Government (Cont.)

#### 3. Knowing what to know

- Businesses are uncertain about whether they are in compliance with laws and regulations, and are uncertain how to find out
- There is a fear that even if the business acts in good faith, it will be ignorant of an important regulation, or misapply it, and then get in trouble

#### 4. Knowing where to go (especially when outside the normal routines)

- Business owners and executives tend to think in terms of problems and issues, while government is organized around its own peculiar bureaucracy and legislation (e.g., is this an IRS or DOL issue?)
- There is uncertainty where to even start to learn; the issue is not where to find a form, but whether a form is needed and which one
- Google is used widely by tech-savvy users to learn about government
- Businesses also lack information on contact points in agencies



## 5.1. Interactions with Government

### Problems in Dealing with Government (Cont.)

#### 5. There are mixed reviews on how much redundant data businesses must submit to the government.

- Businesses do not consider reducing data collection redundancy across the government as a high priority.
  - Refer to section 5.2 on Expectations for where this issue ranks relative to others.
  - Smaller enterprises do not feel as much burden or redundancy of data they must provide the government than some larger companies.
- Issues that do exist regarding data redundancy include the following:
  - There is clearly some cross-agency redundancy, although this was not a major issue with government; examples of redundancy include: BLS, Dept of Commerce (and the state labor board), Social Security, IRS and INS.
  - Inconsistency in form requirements, late follow-up by the government on information business provide, requesting items that the agency has on file (e.g., tax returns), and loss of information businesses submitted.
  - Frustration that comes from a lot of sources beyond federal requirements: different levels of government (federal, state, local), and interestingly, with private entities including insurers and private regulatory bodies (NASD, NYSE).
  - In larger companies, a specialist typically deals with one or a few agencies; in some cases, users have created their own automation for handling multiple data entry.
  - There is a suggestion to have a "common form" that includes common data fields that can be submitted to agencies. This might be an interesting area where the federal govt. can lead, particularly if they coordinate across private, state and local bodies. A "common data base" is less popular because of security and privacy concerns.



## 5.1. Interactions with Government

### The Future of B2G

- ➔ Businesses lack an optimistic view of the future
  - *“It’s been like this for years”*
- ➔ They anticipate increasing automation and online presence that will save time on routine transactions
  - However, there is cynicism that these will be used as a way to cut budgets, and that there will be less access to human beings
- ➔ There is also a lot of concern about a trend towards increasing regulatory burdens
  - This seems like a natural conclusion, and is driven by security concerns and new laws fostered by the electronic economy
  - Some governments are becoming more aggressive in investigations and enforcement (e.g., securities industry)
- ➔ Businesses feel the role of government should be to minimize the burdens and risks of regulation
  - There is minimal interest in government playing a fostering role of helping them learn to manage and profit



## 5.1. Interactions with Government

### E-government

- E-government saves business a lot of time.
  - However, there are concerns about the privacy and security of submitting more information online
- Few government websites or e-businesses can be viewed as “best in class,” though examples are cited below.

#### Government

- IRS.gov (e-filing)
- DOL.gov
- USPTO.gov (U.S. patent office)
- USPS.gov
- SBA.gov
- Commerce Business Daily
- New York State web-site
- New York City web-site
- Washington State Website

#### Associations/Private

- Shrm.org (Society for Human Resource Management, Online)
- Aia.org (American Institute of Architects)
- Boli.com (private site with educational features)
- PACER (federal govt. court filing locator)
- Hrcomply.com (private service)
- Maryland association of CPAs



## **5.1. Interactions with Government Influencers on How to Deal with Government**

- ➔ Businesses and non-profits rely on a variety of sources for information about government and regulation (see list on next page).
- ➔ Common sources include professionals, such as accountants, law firms, and in-house council.
- ➔ There are also private web-sites that provide information as a service.
- ➔ Most important, they turn to a wide range of trade and professional associations; there is a wide variety, based on the locale, size and industry of user.



## 5.1. Interactions with Government Influencers on How to Deal with Government

<b>Financial Managers</b>	American Payroll Association, Tax Services, COST (Coalition of State Taxes), Real Estate Board of New York, Chambers of Commerce
<b>Compliance Managers</b>	Auditors, attorneys, Security Industry Association (SIA), ISEC Security Research, International Trademark Association (INTA)
<b>Mid-Sized Businesses</b>	Society for Human Resource Management (SHRM), World at Work, outside counsel, National Association of Computing Consulting Businesses (NACCB)
<b>Non-Profits</b>	Council on Law and Higher Education, Society for Human Resource Management (SHRM), American Society of Association Executives (ASAE), American Institute of CPAs, Federal Tax Administrators (FTA), Commerce Clearing House (CCH), NIH
<b>HR Managers</b>	Society for Human Resource Management (SHRM), legal dept., networking, associates service center for company, State of Oregon site, BOLI (private site/service)
<b>New Small Businesses</b>	Other business people, National Association for Retail Marketing Services (NARMS), SCORE
<b>Established Small Businesses</b>	BOLI, IRS.gov, State of Oregon (Barber area), OSHA, NIH



## **5.2. Expectations from Business Gateway**

***Awareness, Imagery, and Requirements***





## 5.2. Expectations from Business Gateway Awareness and Image

- Awareness of “business.gov” is close to zero.
  - This is expected because Business Gateway will enhance the site before launching any large-scale communication/outreach efforts.
  - There is evidence the site is used in teaching business students.
- When asked what they would expect to find at a site called ‘business.gov’, impressions are as follows:
  - A portal or search engine that would identify business-related government links on the web
  - Would cover all levels of government – local, state, and federal
  - Would be geared to smaller businesses (because large business users would know where to go)
  - Would help business at all phases, from getting started to selling
  - Because of the vastness of the business and government sectors, it would have to employ some kind of “drill down” or hierarchical approach to allow a business to narrow the content
    - *“I don’t think one size fits all”*



## 5.2. Expectations from BG

### Open-ended

- In brainstorming, businesses suggested the following in what Business Gateway should do...
  - Provide a single portal for finding government links at all levels
  - Help with complying with laws and regulations
    - Include “plain language” explanations of what to do in certain situations
    - Provide a glossary of terms
  - Provide a directory of offices and names – who to talk to, for what issues, and how to reach them
  - Inform its communities of new laws and regulations they need to be aware of (*“If the IRS is cracking down we want to know it”*)
    - E-mail bulletins, customizable to the type of business, is a suggested tool for adding a proactive dimension
  - Make it easier to find and fill out forms (including instructions)
  - Some would like to save and recapture data across agencies.
    - There are concerns about “big brother” and security.



## 5.2. Expectations from BG

### Open-ended (Continued)

- The portal should **include a powerful search engine** that responds to key words.
  - It should tell businesses what to do, not just point to a page.
- BG should be **organized around specific problems and issues** businesses face (not around how government is organized).
  - It may identify multiple laws/regs/offices associated with an issue.
- BG should **allow customization**, including:
  - Saving profiles
  - Tailoring to the type of business with a drill-down or query
- Businesses **do not require “nurturing”** from government, such as contracting opportunities, entrepreneurial communities, etc.; Business Gateway should make it *easy for business to do business*
- Small businesses feel that BG should be organized around business life cycle.
- Non-profits have similar issues, but would need something tailored to their sector



## 5.2. Expectations from BG Reactions to a Pre-defined List

- Businesses were asked to react to the following list of 14 pre-defined priorities by choosing what they feel would be the 4 or 5 most important:
- A. Ability to search for any federal form in a single site
  - B. Consolidate data collection forms and processes so users can submit fewer forms to the government than they already do
  - C. Make sure more (or all) forms can be filled and filed online at a single website
  - D. Have an integrated area where government forms are matched up with information on laws and regulations so users can easily find and understand what forms to fill out for which laws and regulations
  - E. Make it easier for businesses to find and comply with laws and regulations. For example, provide easier access to information on laws and regulations relevant to your business and contact information for experts in the government that can help you understand laws, regulations, and how to comply.
  - F. Make it easier for businesses to understand laws and regulations they need to comply with and how to comply. For example, provide plain-language summaries of regulations and examples of how other organizations have achieved compliance.
  - G. Make federal, state, and local government laws and regulations accessible in one place.
  - H. Provide information to help with business planning throughout various stages, from pre-start-up, to start-up, to maturity, to exit
  - I. Provide information on government contracting (how to procure business, manage it, government contracting regulations, accounting, etc.)
  - J. Provide information of interest to special entrepreneurial communities, such as small businesses, minority owned businesses, women-owned businesses, etc., and provide forums where they can interact
  - K. Information on employment issues, such as regulations pertaining to employees, training, work environments
  - L. Provide information to help businesses with financial planning and taxes
  - M. Provide a customization feature that allows you to access business resources and tools based on your industry/sector, organization size, stage in business life-cycle, role/function in your organization, etc.
  - N. Provide ways to obtain additional information besides web pages, including a FAQs section, telephone hotlines for questions and the ability to speak to a live person, and/or email hotlines to submit questions and receive answers



## 5.2. Expectations from BG Reactions to a Pre-defined List

- ➔ The main priorities that emerged were as follows:
  - **Personal contact.** Businesses hope Business Gateway can help them locate and interact more effectively with the right government employees for compliance issues.
  - **Plain language compliance assistance.** A major concern of businesses and expectation of Business Gateway is help with compliance, in “plain language,” and on issues relevant to them that they are unaware of.
  - **Issue-based searches.** Businesses see a lot of value in an integrated portal that helps them search and locate government information around problems and issues they face (rather than around agencies and regulations).
  - **Searchable, fill-able, file-able forms.** Another key expectation is the ability to electronically find, fill, and file for all levels of government—federal, state, and local.



## 5.2. Expectations from BG Reactions to a Pre-defined List (Summary)

Top Priorities	Secondary Priorities	Less Pressing Priorities
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Provide <b>additional ways to get info</b> besides the web (e.g., phone #s, FAQs) [N]</li> <li>2. Make it easier for businesses to <b>find and comply with laws/regulations</b> [E]</li> <li>3. Make it easier to <b>understand laws and regulations</b> (i.e., using plain language) [F]</li> </ol>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>4. Make <b>federal, state and local</b> regulations accessible in one place [G]</li> <li>5. Provide a <b>customization feature</b> based on industry, size, life cycle, function [M]</li> <li>6. Ability to <b>search for any federal form</b> in a single site [A]</li> <li>7. <b>Filling and filing forms online</b> at a single site [C]</li> <li>8. Information on <b>employment issues</b> [K]</li> <li>9. <b>Match up forms with info on laws/regulations</b> [D]</li> <li>10. <b>Consolidate forms and processes</b> [B]</li> </ol>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>11. Provide info to help <b>business planning</b> through all stages** [H]</li> <li>12. Provide info on <b>govt. contracting</b> [I]</li> <li>13. Provide info for special <b>entrepreneurial communities</b> [J]</li> <li>14. Provide info to help businesses with <b>financial planning and taxes</b> [L]</li> </ol>

\*\*While this was lower in priority in general, it was a high priority for entrepreneurs and owners of new small businesses.



## 5.2. Expectations from BG Reactions to a Pre-defined List

	<b>Top Priorities</b>	<b>Secondary Priorities</b>
<b>Financial Managers</b>	-Compliance [E] -Additional access points [N] -Understanding laws [F]	-Single forms filing site [C] -All levels in one place [G]
<b>Compliance Managers</b>	-Additional access points [N] -Compliance [E]	-Single forms filing site [C] -All levels in one place [G] -Employment issues info [K] -Customization [M]
<b>Mid-Sized Businesses</b>	-Compliance [E] -Understanding laws [F]	-Additional access points [N] -Customization [M]
<b>Non-Profits</b>	-Additional access points [N] -Understanding laws [F]	-Integrating forms, regs, info [D]
<b>HR Managers</b>	-Additional access points [N]	-Single forms search site [A] -Integrating forms, regs, info [D]
<b>New Small Businesses</b>	-Compliance [E] <b>-Business planning [H]</b>	-Understanding laws [F] -Single forms search site [A]
<b>Established Small Biz</b>	-Understanding laws [F] -Additional access points [N]	-Single forms search site [A] -Compliance [E]



## 5.2. Expectations from Business Gateway Reasons for Priorities

- *“Provide ways to obtain additional information besides web pages, including a FAQs section, telephone hotlines for questions, and the ability to speak to a live person, and/or email hotlines to submit questions and obtain answers.” [N]*
  - This is the top priority because businesses rely on direct contact with employees to deal with regulatory compliance.
  - Businesses also like having other channels to contact, such as email or Instant Messenger.
- *“Make it easier for businesses to find and comply with laws and regulations. E.g., provide easier access to information on laws and regulations relevant to your business and contact information for experts in the government that can help you understand laws, regulations, and how to comply.” [E]*
  - Compliance is the single biggest issue businesses need help with.
  - Businesses also like the idea of having access to “experts” in government, which is what they currently seek in their day to day dealings.





## 5.2. Expectations from Business Gateway Reasons for Priorities (cont.)

- *“Make it easier for businesses to understand laws and regulations they need to comply with and how to comply. E.g., provide plain-language summaries of regulations and examples of how other organizations have achieved compliance.” [F]*
  - Businesses are desperate for “plain language” descriptions, which is lacking in government.
  - Even when they rely on professionals for advice, they would like to be better informed and can more effectively manage their professionals if they understand the laws better.
- *“Make federal, state and local government laws and regulations accessible in one place.” [G]*
  - The reality is that many issues have to be addressed at multiple levels, so users would like to be able to access information simultaneously, in one place.
  - Businesses with multiple locations also have a hard time navigating the myriad of local and state sites.



## 5.2. Expectations from BG

### Expectations – Reasons for Priorities (cont.)

- *“Provide a customization feature that allows you to access business resources and tools based on your industry/sector, organization size, stage in business life-cycle, role/function in your organization, etc.” [M]*
  - Businesses realize that the amount of information and user types can be overwhelming.
  - A customization feature would save users a lot of time using an online portal by providing direct access to their needs.
  - One suggestion is to save a profile (e.g., “my business gateway”).
- *“Ability to search for any federal form in a single site” [A]; “Make sure more (or all) forms can be filled and filed online at a single web site” [C]; “Have an integrated area where government forms are matched up with information on laws and regulations so users can easily find and understand what forms to fill out for which laws and regulations.” [D]*
  - Much of the current interaction, particularly among medium and small sized businesses, involves finding, filling and filing forms.
  - These users tend to be tech-savvy, and find dealing with forms electronically saves them a lot of time.
  - There has already been tangible progress in this area (e.g., IRS.gov), demonstrating its value.



## **5.3. Reactions to Business Gateway**

***Opinions on Business.gov,  
Forms.gov, Business Laws, and  
Compliance Assistance  
Resources***



## 5.3. Reactions to Business Gateway

- Business were taken on a guided tour of four different areas of Business Gateway, and asked to write down a rating for each one on a scale of 1 to 10 (poor to excellent).
  - This is not a scientific rating because of the dynamic and interactive group process, but it gives a sense of what is working and what is not.
  - Business.gov, Forms.gov, and Business Laws all received ratings of about 6 (half at or above, half at or below).
  - COMPASS received a general rating of around 8, although businesses were reacting more to the concept than the execution (the demonstrations did not always yield productive results, so moderators avoided live demonstrations with COMPASS).
- A common issue is that **businesses would like to search and access information using their own language, which is issue/problem focused**, but get frustrated trying to do this.



## 5.3. Reactions to Business Gateway Business.gov

- The median rating for business.gov is about a 6, with opinions varying widely – some are true fans of the site, while others find it inadequate.
- The most enthusiastic users are:
  - Entrepreneurs, who found the resources around life cycle to be relevant and helpful for planning
  - Financial managers, who get subjected to a wide range of information requests and would find the site to be a useful search tool
- The least enthusiastic are compliance managers, who sense the site is geared to small businesses, and feel their needs are better served by going directly to the agencies they deal with.
- A regular comment about the site was “I need to see more” in order to render judgment.
  - However, many who said this had been allowed some fairly detailed searches and were not always sure the outcome was useful.



## 5.3. Reactions to Business Gateway

### Strengths of Business.gov

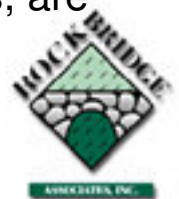
- The idea of business.gov is exciting to businesses: it promises to be the universal search engine/portal that allows access to government at all levels, plain language, and to the right contacts within government to help them.
- Users like the “look and feel” of the site, reacting positively to color schemes, graphics, and fonts.
- The organization around business lifecycles is ideally suited for small, emerging businesses.
  - The menu bar under “select a topic” makes sense.
- Users like the “plain language” resources, which meet their needs for understanding laws and regulations.
  - More of these write-ups would be useful.
- Links to non-government sources are viewed as acceptable and even desirable, so long as they are useful, objective, credible sources.



## 5.3. Reactions to Business Gateway Priorities for Business.gov

A major issue is that the site appears to be highly focused to small businesses, particularly start-ups.

- There is a lopsided emphasis of space on “Find a SBDC/mentor.”
  - Graphics also emphasize the small business focus, such as the seedling graphic.
- Content often reinforces the notion it is for small businesses only.
  - For example, the various topics under “training”, talk about SCORE, SBDCs, and “small business assistance.”
- The organization around life cycle does not make sense for medium sized and larger businesses, particularly publicly traded ones.
- The small business perception creates a major credibility problem among users in larger organizations who desire hard knowledge on difficult compliance issues.
- Non-profits may find useful content, but are skeptical about a site so focused on business in general.
  - *“Why would we go to business.gov for a non-profit organization?”*
- Experienced business people—including those in small enterprises—viewed the content as very general and basic and not detailed, specific, or technical enough for their needs.
  - For example, the step-by-step guides, which are useful to newer companies, are seen as basic to some of the more experienced businesses.





## 5.3. Reactions to Business Gateway

### Priorities for Business.gov: specifics

The screenshot shows the Business.gov homepage. At the top, it says "Business.GOV" with a small plant icon. Below this is a navigation bar with four tabs: "Launching", "Managing", "Growing", and "Getting Out". To the right of the main content is a sidebar with a search bar, a "GO" button, and a list of topics under "SELECT A TOPIC". The topics include Business Laws, Employees, Finances, Government Contracting, International Trade, Other Entrepreneurial Communities, Research and Resources, Taxes, Training, and Workforce Development. The main content area has a heading "Direct entry to information, forms, and assistance when you need it." followed by a description of the site's purpose. Below this are links to "Find development programs near you." and "Find a Development Center By Region." and "Learn from Experts Find a Mentor." and "Help us improve our site".

Graphics reinforce the impressions of being for small business only.

Lifecycle organization works for smaller start-ups, but is not relevant to larger companies.

Users expect "industry" links to be a way of tailoring info searches to their industry.

Too much space is dedicated to new, emerging business and to information of less pressing priority.

The "other topics" navigation bar reflects categories of interest and should be more prominent.

The greatest value comes from these core areas: search, compliance, laws, employees, etc.





## Slide 64

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j6

Adjusted this call-out up so does not cover Rockbridge logo

jchung, 6/1/2005

## 5.3. Reactions to Business Gateway Priorities for Business.gov (cont.)

- When users were asked to select their own search paths, they often encountered inconsistencies in content depth and quality:
  - In some situations, relevant content on Business.gov or the agency site it links to is lacking.  
Example: the articles under “termination” of employees did not address the major concerns which were aptly stated in the summary on the page (i.e., avoiding lawsuits).
  - In other situations, the number of links are overwhelming and require scrolling; this is counter to the desire for an efficient search capability.
- Web site text sometimes lacks credibility.
  - It would be helpful to cite authorship from an acknowledged expert.
  - There are also concerns as to how current information is, so a date would be helpful.
- Some users expect greater consistency in page appearance, which comes up when linking to pages for other government sites, but this could be due to confusion as to whether Business.gov is a search engine/resource portal or a freestanding resource.
- Industry links do not always meet expectations.
  - Users expect these links to help organize searches specific to their industry.
  - Sector/industry categories are too broad to be very relevant/helpful.



## 5.3. Reactions to Business Gateway Forms.gov

- Forms.gov is also rated about a 6 out of 10.
  - Businesses love the concept, but encounter problems finding the forms they need and when/how to use them.
  - *“The concept is great as long as you can find what you’re looking for...”*
- The most satisfied are Financial Managers, who view this as another resource to make them productive, especially when they are not using their normal sites (like the IRS).
- The most skeptical are Compliance Managers, who access forms a lot and have trouble finding their own forms on the site.



## 5.3. Reactions to Business Gateway Strengths of Forms.gov

- Users like the concept of being able to search for and access all federal forms from a single site.
- In theory, it is useful to have multiple search capabilities, including the key word search and other options (such as search by number).
- Businesses like the format of the page that is provided for search results, which cleanly provides links to the forms, instructions, and most recent update...

...however, users would like a more detailed description so they know if it is the form they need, before taking the time to download it.

**Forms.gov**  
THE U.S. GOVERNMENT'S OFFICIAL HUB FOR FEDERAL FORMS

**Forms Search Results**  
For business content other than forms or instructions: [search](#) business.gov.  
Your search for form number like 1040 returned 35 results. They are listed below.

[New Search](#)

AGENCY	FORM #	FORM NAME	FORM / INSTRUCTIONS	REVISED
Treas	1040	<a href="#">U.S. Individual Income Tax Return</a>	Form Only	2003
Treas	1040 (PR)	<a href="#">Self-Employment Tax Return (Puerto Rico)</a>	Form Only	2003
Treas	1040 (PR)	<a href="#">Instrucciones para la Forma 1040-PR</a>	Instructions Only	2003
Treas	1040 A	<a href="#">Instructions for Form 1040-A</a>	Instructions Only	2003
Treas	1040 C	<a href="#">U.S. Departing Alien Income Tax Return</a>	Form Only	2004
Treas	1040 C	<a href="#">Instructions for Form 1040C</a>	Instructions Only	2004
Treas	1040 ES	<a href="#">Estimated Tax for Individuals</a>	Both Form and Instructions	2004
	1040 ES (NR)	<a href="#">U.S. Estimated Tax for Nonresident Alien Individuals</a>	Both Form and Instructions	2004
Treas	1040 ES (SP)	<a href="#">Estimated Income Tax for Individuals (Spanish)</a>	Both Form and Instructions	2004
Treas	1040 EZ	<a href="#">Income Tax Return for Single and Joint Filers With No Dependents</a>	Form Only	2003



## 5.3. Reactions to Business Gateway Priorities for Forms.gov

- Forms.gov rarely sends the users directly to the forms they need, and most searches tried in the focus groups were not successful.
  - Businesses want to search by their particular problem/issue, and get the optimal forms-related links across all government organizations.
    - The keyword search engine falls short of yielding useful results; users are accustomed to “Google” quality, and the results from forms.gov do not always make sense.
  - The search-by-number option does not seem to work well, even for common forms.
    - Users are not allowed to include letters in the form number search, which seems to be a limitation; for example, a large number of forms comes up with the same number.
  - The search-by-agency option is not as useful (why not go to the agency site?), but more important, businesses do not know enough about the federal organization to find their agencies.
    - Example: users could not find the Securities and Exchange Commission
  - Search-by-letter does not seem to help users.



## 5.3. Reactions to Business Gateway

### Priorities for Forms.gov: specifics

Right idea, but not  
“Google” quality; should  
find solutions to problems

Many users do not know  
the form number, only the  
issue they face

Users are not familiar  
with the federal agency  
structure (or if they know,  
they would go to the  
agency site)

This does not help navigation, and could  
return over a hundred unrelated forms;  
*alpha*-numeric search capability should be  
combined in “by form number”

The screenshot shows the Forms.gov homepage. At the top is the logo "Forms.GOV" with the tagline "THE U.S. GOVERNMENT'S OFFICIAL HUB FOR FEDERAL FORMS". Below this is a "Forms" section with a description: "The Forms Catalog provides citizens and businesses with a common access point to federal agency forms." A "Locate Your Form" section follows, with three options: "By Form Number" (with a magnifying glass icon), "By Agency" (with a magnifying glass icon), and "All Forms (A-Z)" (with a magnifying glass icon). Each option has a brief description. To the right of the main content is a search bar with a "GO" button and a list of links: "FAQ's", "Give Feedback", "Privacy & Security", and "Accessibility".

Home . Business.gov

SEARCH

GO

FAQ's

Give Feedback

Privacy & Security

Accessibility

**Forms**

The Forms Catalog provides citizens and businesses with a common access point to federal agency forms.

**Locate Your Form**

**By Form Number**  
If you know the number of the form you are looking for, such as SS-4 or CD-346

**By Agency**  
If you know the agency that has the form you are looking for, such as Department of Agriculture or Patent and Trademark Office

**All Forms (A-Z)**  
If you know the name of the form you are looking for, such as Export Information Services Order Form or Budget Information Form

**Still Can't Find a Specific Form Here?**  
If you can't find the form you need in the E-Forms Catalog we suggest:

through the [Agency Forms](#) links.

[FirstGov](#), a connection to the U.S. Government's information and services.

GSA (GS), [Standard \(SF\)](#) and [Optional \(OF\)](#) Forms, the General Services Administration's library for GSA internal forms and government-wide Standard and Optional Forms.



## 5.3. Reactions to Business Gateway Priorities for Forms.gov (Continued)

- Business offered some other suggestions to make Forms.gov more user-friendly.
  - Most important: Provide a brief description of each form with the search results so users know if they should try that link
  - Provide information on when and why certain forms are needed
  - Link instructions to the forms
  - Provide a capability for viewing the forms before downloading
- Many users also feel the link on the homepage of Business.gov could be more prominent or moved to the “select a topic” list.



## 5.3. Reactions to Business Gateway Business Laws

- The Business Laws section was rated about a 6 out of 10.
- Most enthusiastic were entrepreneurs and future entrepreneurs, who wanted general advice on legal issues for business start-ups.
- The major strengths of this area include the concept (an issue of great interest) and general organization of topics.
- The biggest problem is that the content seems to be general and lacks the depth that would make it useful to experienced managers and business owners; they would prefer a search capability that gets closer to the source of a law or regulation.
- Most businesses would like to be able to talk to a live person about business laws and regulations.
  - Many issues require back and forth discussion, and it is useful to get concurrence from the government.





## 5.3. Reactions to Business Gateway COMPASS

- COMPASS is an interactive compliance tool that is in the “proof of concept” stage.
- This feature was rated the highest of any in Business Gateway, an 8 out of 10.
- The most enthusiastic users are entrepreneurs in a small market, who seemed to be awed by the sophistication.
- The least enthusiastic were the compliance managers in a large market, who felt the tool did not add much value over the current resources they use.
- Ultimately, the name “COMPASS” may need to be changed to something more meaningful to the user.



## 5.3. Reactions to Business Gateway Strengths of COMPASS

- At first glance, COMPASS seems to deliver exactly what users are looking for...
  - It “narrows down” the search for information by using a query method.
  - It seems to focus the search around industry and business characteristics.
  - It addresses a core issue, helping businesses to comply with regulations.
  - While it does not currently have a keyword search capability, it does have a list of logical topics to help with searching.



## 5.3. Reactions to Business Gateway Priorities for COMPASS

- A key issue is the quality of the results compared to the level of effort in setting up the search parameters.
  - Users want the resources COMPASS finds to be sufficiently tailored to the search parameters (as opposed to giving the same general answers regardless).
  - Searches should be tested for perceived rigor.
- Identify a better way to encompass all industries.
  - Users find the NAICS list archaic for classifying businesses; not everyone knows their NAICS code.
  - It might be helpful to provide an expanded list, or provide examples under a broad industry category so businesses know what category they fall into.
- It was suggested that users be allowed to save a profile so they can conduct new searches with less data entry.



## 5.3. Reactions to Business Gateway Priorities for COMPASS: Specifics

The concept is exactly what business seeks... “your answers will better tailor your results...”

These traditional categories are very broad (e.g., where is a restaurant?)

These questions contribute to a “small business only” perception.

Users are not sure what this means.

This creates an expectation of state specific results.

This creates an expectation for high-quality, issue-specific search results.

The screenshot shows the 'Business Gateway Compass' web application. The header includes the title and a subtitle: 'Quickly Identify Compliance Assistance Resources That Apply To Your Business'. Below the header, there is a prompt: 'Please describe your operations/business; be as specific as possible. Hold down CTRL to select multiple items. All questions are optional - your answers will better tailor your results.' The main form contains several sections: 'NAICS Code' with a text input and a double-headed arrow; 'Your Industry Sector' with a list of categories including Accommodation and Food Services, Administrative and Support, Agriculture, Forestry, Fishing and Hunting, Arts, Entertainment, and Recreation, Construction, Educational Services, Finance and Insurance, Health Care and Social Assistance, and Information; 'Your Industry Subsector' with a dropdown menu; 'Do you have employees?' with a dropdown menu set to 'Employees'; 'State' with a dropdown menu set to 'Any'; 'Is this a new or existing business?' with a dropdown menu set to 'Existing'; 'Regulation Types' with a list of categories including Environmental, Labor, Taxes, Transportation, and Work Safety; 'Information Types' with a list of categories including Guidance, Assistance Tools, and Other; and 'Keywords' with a text input. At the bottom, there is a checkbox for 'Enable Decision Tracing' and a 'Continue' button. The footer of the application mentions 'Developed By Belzabar Software Design'.

## 5.3. Compliance Assistance

- The Compliance Assistance section includes an OMB site identifying compliance resources from agencies.
- Businesses have trouble understanding the purpose or value of this site, despite its inherent value.
  - Businesses tend to speak in plain language and organize their information searches around problem situations; in contrast, the site uses government-specific jargon and organizes its content around the federal hierarchy and statutes.
  - Users are confused about coverage; they do not know the difference between cabinet-level agencies and other types.



Example: these links seem directed to a government audience.



## **5.4. Intent to Use Business Gateway**

***Perceptions of who it is for and plans to visit in the future***



## 5.4. Intentions to Use Business Gateway

### *Who it is for*

- When asked who Business Gateway is *currently* designed for...
  - Almost all feel small business
  - About half feel medium sized businesses
  - Slightly fewer feel it is for large businesses
  - It is not seen as appropriate for non-profits in its current form
- When asked who Business Gateway *should* be for, users tend to feel it should be for all types of businesses, not just geared to smaller ones or start-ups.
  - Users think it is worthwhile to develop the sites further (that is, few believe this is a waste of resources).
  - Some have concerns that the sites not be redundant with existing government resources.
  - Non-profits feel they would benefit from a similar site tailored to their sector, but do not think a site that is so business-focused would pertain them.



## 5.4. Intentions to Use Business Gateway

### *Willingness to Return*

- Virtually all businesses indicate a willingness to visit Business Gateway in the future, if just to learn more about what it can offer.
- About half are confident they will visit the site more than once, while others indicate that subsequent visits would be based on the value they get the first time they visit.





## **6. Association Interview Findings**

### ***Results to Interviews with Associations***



## 6. Association Findings

### *Association Member Interactions with Government*

- Association opinion leaders believe their members' satisfaction with government interactions is low, and that members' view all interactions with government as burdensome.
  - Some agencies are good at giving information, but for the most part, businesses have difficulty locating and reaching the right person.
  - When the right person is located, businesses often receive confusing, even contradictory, information.
  - Many businesses will not call an agency with compliance questions for fear of drawing attention to their concerns and therefore being audited.
  - Businesses have difficulty finding needed information or forms.
- While the use of the internet is becoming more common, many association opinion leaders believe their members rely mainly on phone, fax, and first class mail to communicate with government.
  - Large businesses are more likely than small ones to use the internet to interact with government; they have more technology resources, tend to be more “internet savvy”, and have dedicated government specialists who know how to access online resources.
    - In contrast, smaller businesses are less internet-savvy and some lack ready internet access at the workplace.
    - Even among the internet-savvy, businesses often need to call a contact at an agency when they cannot find the information that they need on the web.



## 6. Association Findings

### *Regulatory Burdens and their Impact*

- Businesses face many regulatory burdens, including:
  - Tax issues
  - Employment/labor laws, including OSHA and workman's compensation
    - Society for Human Resource Management's Information Center receives 8,000 questions per year about the Fair Labor Standards Act alone, followed by 4,000 questions per year about the Family Medical Leave Act
    - *"Retirement plans are the area of greatest non-compliance, followed by the Family Medical Leave Act – just from sheer confusion"*
  - Energy issues (e.g., gas, oil) and environmental law
  - Healthcare
  - ADA
  - Other issues mentioned include fax/spam/telemarketing rules, SEC issues, immigration concerns, and international business law
- Associations consider the impact of regulatory burdens on their members to be tremendous, from putting a company out of business to putting owners in jail
  - Small business owners want to comply ("they love information") and try hard to understand laws and regulations that apply to them
  - The U.S. has a "22% regulatory burden" (from complying with EPA, healthcare, and other regulations) – this affects bottom lines
  - Multi-state vendors face the most regulatory complications, because of varying definitions from state to state
- Small businesses lack a voice in influencing regulation
  - *"The biggest problem is that small businesses are not aware of the rulemaking ... they don't read the Federal Register... they don't have time to comment on proposed legislation"*



## **6. Association Findings**

### ***Regulatory Burdens and their Impact***

- The business/government relationship is not likely to improve in the future (unless regulations are pared down)
  - However, there may be future opportunities for government to provide better education, especially on compliance
  - Associations believe that the internet offers the potential for improvement in the G2B relationship by providing more information and better communication to help with compliance
- Not surprisingly, associations believe their members look to their organizations to learn about regulations and their impact on their businesses
  - Larger companies also have in-house resources to help them deal with government requirements, while smaller concerns are challenged to even know which laws they must comply with
  - Networking among fellow businesses is another avenue for learning about regulations and their impact



## 6. Association Findings

### *Associations and E-Government*

- Associations are unsure of what “e-government” means to their members
  - For example, with Business Gateway, there is a question of whether it is a learning/resource site or an opportunity/ commerce site
  - *“Scary because there’s no definition of what it could be; it’s so big” (“will I ever find what I’m looking for”)*
- The definition of e-government includes:
  - Ability to find information and forms electronically
  - Ways to use technology to increase the benefits that government can deliver to businesses and individual citizens
  - E-mail access to government
  - Using the internet to get business with the government
- E-Government is flagged as a priority issue to members of one association – they believe their members could benefit greatly from e-Government initiatives
  - Another association that represents associations is concerned about the redundancy of initiatives like Business Gateway with their members’ own activities: “this is what we and our member associations do”



## 6. Association Findings

### *Associations and E-Government*

- Associations do not sense high usage of or satisfaction with e-government, particularly among small businesses (who are struggling with the basics of dealing with government in general)
  - Some cite the “loss of human touch” that has come with internet usage
  - One association mentioned the need to store forms electronically and track the submissions:

*“UPS gives me a tracking number. Why can’t the government?”*
- A few associations believe their members are pleased with the forms and publications that are now available online from government
- Expectations are that e-gov usage by businesses will increase in the near future



## 6. Association Findings

### *Associations and E-Government*

Interviewed associations provided insight into what web sites they consider to be best-in-class, which BG should consult for ideas and best practices:

#### Government

- Fedbizopps.gov
- Regulation.gov (very good)
- IRS.gov (e-filing) (very good)
- DOL.gov (“one of the best”)
- SSA.gov
- FCC Electronic Filing
- U.S. House of Representatives Small Business
- EPA Small Business
- Washington State
- State of Illinois
- Illinois Gateway to Government
- City of Chicago
- State of Colorado Economic Business Office
- Washington, DC city government

#### Associations/Private

- Commerce Clearinghouse Business Owner’s Toolkit ([www.toolkit.cch.com/](http://www.toolkit.cch.com/))
- KC Source Link ([www.kcsourcelink.com](http://www.kcsourcelink.com))
- ASBDC soon-to-be-updated website ([www.asbdc-us.org](http://www.asbdc-us.org))



## 6. Association Findings

### *How “Business.gov” Impacts Expectations*

- Even before learning about Business Gateway and its various site areas, the name “business.gov” has certain connotations to associations.
  - Several think they and their members would expect to find a site with government data (e.g., BLS, CPR, productivity data, measures of current economy).
  - Many also believe a site with this name would cover opportunities for doing business with the government.
  - Non-profits are unlikely to use a website called “business.gov” (confirming what was said in focus groups).
  - Associations believe that members will only use this site if “they don’t know where else to go; otherwise they’ll go to the appropriate agency’s website”.





## 6. Association Findings

### *Expectations for Business Gateway*

- Associations expect Business Gateway to help members conduct their normal business with the government.
- A government portal for businesses should offer:
  - Links to regulations and forms
  - Content on which laws apply based on industry, company type, company size, and experience (e.g., first-time business owners vs. experienced business owners)
  - Everything businesses could normally do offline should be doable online.
    - E.g., obtain forms, access updated regulations, contact agencies, order additional information, file for compliance, receive updates
  - There should be a search engine capability, including:
    - The ability to search by industry, # of employees, and state
    - Results that address all applicable federal and state laws
  - Personalization capabilities are recommended if the site is used for managing information (e.g., getting reminders about which forms are due and when they are due).
    - Personalization is not of interest if it is only used to customize the content on the home page (e.g., the way some sites show which articles appear on the homepage).



## 6. Association Findings

### *Expectations for Business Gateway*

- Many of those interviewed have expertise in organizing online resources for businesses, and offered useful tactical upgrades to the Business Gateway portal, including:
  - Organization and Content
    - A site menu/map to keep users from feeling lost
    - “Date posted” information for each form
    - “Best practices” for each industry
    - An e-gov ombudsman in each agency
      - E.g., an IRS directory is not useful, but a single point of contact would be
  - Functionality
    - Confirmation e-mails of, and ability to track, online filings
    - Ability to print and save information
    - A “forward this link to a friend” functionality
  - Positioning/Branding
    - Better definition of the relationship between site and government, such as a link to SBA



## 6. Association Findings

### *Expectations for Business Gateway*

- Business Gateway should **not** offer:
  - Advice (providing advice potentially creates a liability issue and the appearance of pushing a political agenda)
  - Forums
  - Information on training programs, since it would constitute an endorsement of those particular programs
- Associations disagree about offering online payment functionality.
  - Many associations believe online payment would be “a big plus” while some caution that the proprietary information would be too risky to submit online, especially to a general website.
- There is some worry that Business Gateway could become competition for association websites.



## 6. Association Findings

### *Priorities for Business Gateway*

- ➔ The associations reacted to the same priority list as businesses did in the focus groups, and for the most part, have similar views as businesses.
- ➔ Association opinion-leaders believe **Business Gateway should focus heavily on compliance assistance.**
- ➔ **Top priorities** include:
  - Make it easier...to **find and comply with laws and regulations** (E)
    - Users must know that the site is 100% accurate and 100% thorough: “If I do these things, I must know that I will be in compliance”
  - Make it **easier for businesses to understand laws and regulations...**(F)
  - Have an integrated area where government **forms are matched with information on laws and regulations...**(D, A)
    - The matching functionality is valuable
  - Provide **information on employment issues**, such as regulations pertaining to employees, training, work environments (K)
    - Labor issues are a major concern for businesses.
  - Make sure **forms can be filled and filed online at a single website** and that the **data collection process is streamlined.** (B, C)

\*Letters refer to items in a handout of 14 options that business focus groups also responded to (see page.



## 6. Association Findings

### *Priorities for Business Gateway*

- **Mixed/unclear priority level.** Some priorities get mixed reactions, with some associations believing they are important and others believing they should be avoided:
  - A number of associations place a high priority on having **federal, state, and local regulations accessible in one location** (G), and ensuring **several avenues for getting answers** to questions from government (N)
  - Associations are divided on whether there should be a **customization feature** (M), with some believing this would be helpful and others believing that other groups perform this function and that it should not be part of the core mission.
  - A couple of associations believe it is valuable to have a **listing of contracting opportunities** (I), but just as many feel there should be just a simple link to fedbizopps.gov.
  - **Reducing the redundancy of data collection processes** (B) emerged as less of a priority and viewed as desirable but “impossible” or a “dream”
- **Lesser priority.** Some priorities are rated generally low by associations, including:
  - Helping businesses with **planning through various stages** (H) and providing **material for special entrepreneurial communities** (J)
  - Interviewed associations consider features such as effective search capabilities and contact options to be basic requirements and do not note them to be a development priority.

\*Letters refer to items in a handout of 14 options that business focus groups also responded to (see slide 52).



## 6. Association Findings

### *Feedback on Business Gateway: Business.gov*

- Associations would tend not to recommend Business Gateway to members in its current form.
  - Most had difficulty navigating the site and were reluctant to spend a lot of time; they felt their members would do the same
  - They feel that right now, “less is more” and the sites have to be very user-friendly to ensure businesses return to the site
- **Business.gov** is perceived as being oriented to very small businesses, with content such as getting started and finding a mentor, and is less valuable for established and larger businesses
- There is also a question of the value of the site; it could take up a lot of time when a business could go directly to an agency’s site
  - There needs to be a better way of handling the competing interests in the hierarchy
    - It often overwhelms the user with information (e.g., click on “write a business plan” and get 50 resources)
- Association opinion leaders have similar usability issues as businesses in the focus groups; e.g., they get confused when linked to a page for a specific agency that is not part of business.gov



## 6. Association Findings

### *Feedback on Business Gateway: Business.gov*

Other specific feedback on business.gov included:

- There is potential for users to get lost on the site (one association recommends walking the user step-by-step through the search process).
- A site menu/map to keep users from feeling lost
- Associations believe that many small- and medium-sized businesses live in fear of being audited by the government, to the extent that they will not call for assistance or with questions; a huge disclaimer on the homepage is needed to allay their fears:  
*“Your privacy is protected. No cookie information is collected and no individual or agency tracks the results of your search.”*
- Need to significantly improve search engine
- The links on the right-hand side were often overlooked; small text and reverse print hindered readability
- Contact information for assistance at business.gov must be provided



## 6. Association Findings

### *Feedback on Business Gateway: Forms.gov*

- **Forms.gov** is viewed as a valuable area of Business Gateway, but is overwhelming
  - Businesses using it would have to know which forms to look for first before they could use forms.gov
  - The link is not prominently featured on the business.gov homepage
  - Satisfaction will be almost entirely dependent on the quality of the search engine (which corroborates with what businesses experienced in focus groups)
    - Plain text searching (in terms the businesses use) is imperative
    - The search engine is not returning the results expected (despite knowing the form number)
    - Several suggest partnering with Google to increase user satisfaction
    - Very clear search instructions will be needed (e.g., are quotation marks necessary or not?)





## 6. Association Findings

### *Feedback on Business Gateway: Business Laws*

- **Business Laws** has a similar issue as forms.gov in that businesses would need to know which laws to look for in advance; other issues include:
  - The link was not noticed on the homepage
  - Associations are confused by the links taking them to another agency's site (better descriptions are needed for all links)
  - There is disappointment in where the links take them (“who made the decision that this was the correct place to go for this information?”)
  - Note: The National Federation of Independent Businesses created its own compliance guide, nfib.com, which it believes is superior
- Over half of the associations believed that COMPASS has the potential to be a helpful resource to their members
  - Search engine must be robust and must return needed forms
  - Results must be displayed the way businesses would expect them (e.g., by law or regulation name, not “Resource ID: 474”)
  - Several refinements are needed before COMPASS would be useful, including refining the search/pull-down options (especially regarding employees)
- The associations that do not believe COMPASS would be useful for their members feel their members are just as likely to use a regular search engine or telephone an expert for an answer



## 6. Association Findings

### *Moving forward*

- Interviewed associations **recommended next steps** for BG:
  - Business.gov must be defined before it can be refined: “What is its purpose? Who is the audience?”
  - Business.gov must be expanded to be relevant to medium and large businesses
  - Usability testing needs to be conducted
    - Give businesses “tasks” and see how efficiently they can complete them using the site
  - Improve upon COMPASS
  - Gain agency and association buy-in for marketing the site
- Associations suggest the following **ways to measure success**:
  - Number of unique hits per month
  - Click-throughs
  - Usability studies
  - Business owners’ (repeated) use
  - Users’ recommendations/referrals to the site
  - Online satisfaction survey (i.e., asking users if they were able to find what they needed)
- Nine of the 11 associations expressed an interest in serving on an advisory committee to BG.



## **7. Recommendations and Next Steps**



## 7. Recommendations

### Project Scope

1. **Segment the audience to position and organize content**, since BG loses credibility when it gives the impression of being all things to all business types; recommended segmentation:

#### **Primary Audience:**

- Small and emerging businesses (for which the current lifecycle focus is a suitable sub-segmentation)
  - This might be further divided into new and established/experienced businesses
- Medium-sized businesses and generalists within large companies; these would be executives (e.g., Financial and HR) with a wide range of governmental responsibilities
- Managers in non-profit institutions

#### **Secondary Audience:**

- Executives in larger companies with specialized responsibilities (e.g., Compliance Managers)



## 7. Recommendations

### Project Scope (Continued)

2. **Prioritize business segments that are in greatest need of its resources**, but it needs to do more than just satisfy small businesses.
  - Entrepreneurs and small and medium-size business users (and large company generalists) should be the immediate priority, based on need and what is already developed.
  - Non-profits—There is clearly a need for a portal to help non-profits with regulations and compliance issues that are common across businesses and non-profit organizations, but the brand “business.gov” may pose a challenge in reaching this group.
  - Business Gateway can de-prioritize specialists within large corporations:
    - Large, specialized corporate users might best be served by dedicated initiatives within the agencies they work with (e.g., patent office, SEC, IRS for some professionals).



## 7. Recommendations

### Project Scope (Continued)

3. **Refine and integrate BG's current tools and resources.**
  - COMPASS, Business Laws and forms.gov are each highly valued in *concept*, but will require a lot of refinement.
  - There is a question as to whether these resources are inherently redundant, BG should consider whether their functionality can be combined to speed up development and lower cost (i.e., a key word search engine that includes links to laws/regs, plain language, and forms).
4. **Resist drawing definitive conclusions regarding data harmonization and forms processing.** The research does not suggest that data harmonization and streamlining of duplicate data is a major issue with business; unless these efforts will save money inside the government, the value of these initiatives should be validated with quantitative research (a large-scale survey).



## 7. Recommendations

### Project Scope (Continued)

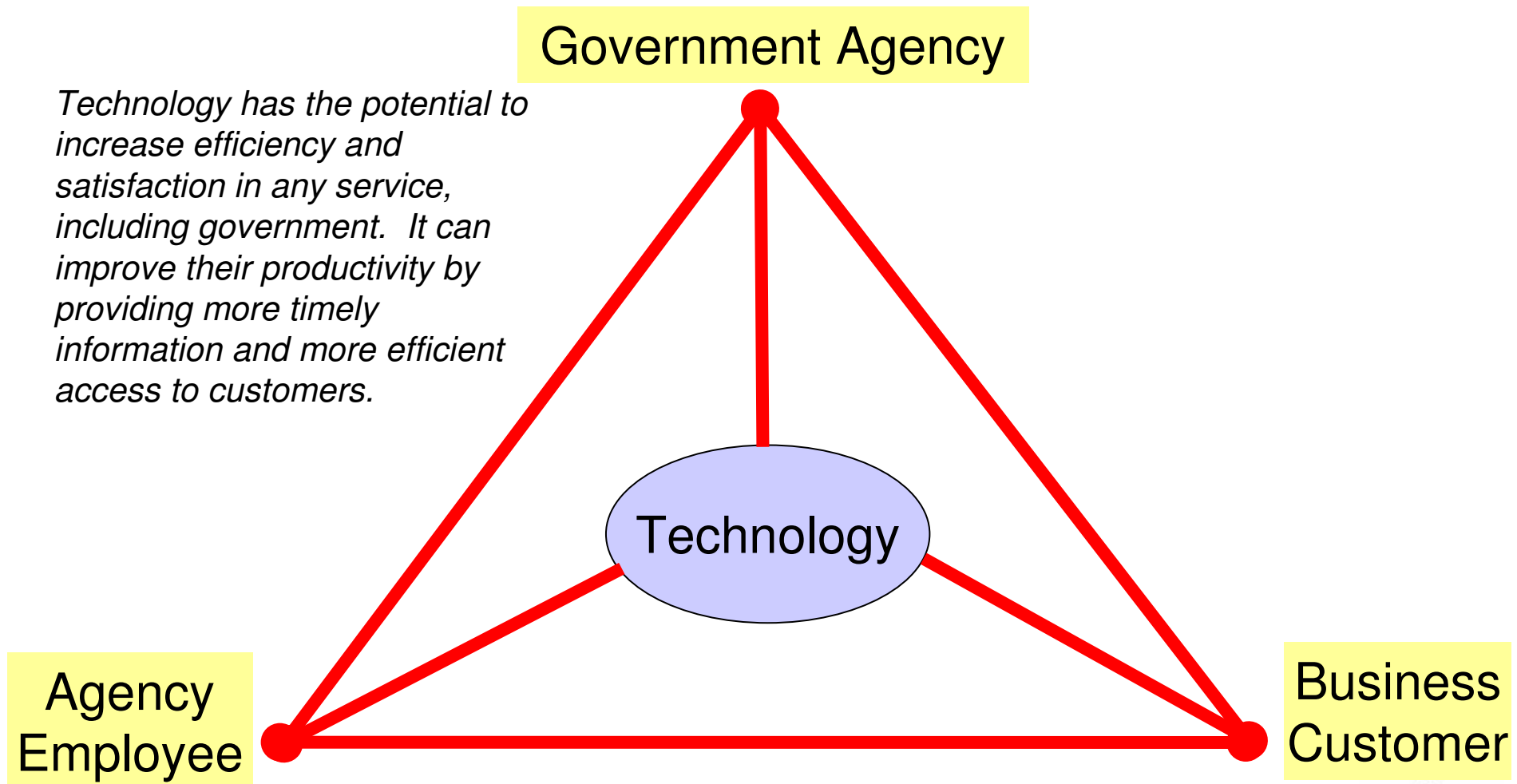
#### 5. Focus resource investments on businesses' top priorities, as identified during the focus groups and interviews with trade associations:

- **Provide easier access to *people***, since that is often necessary to comply with regulations; Business Gateway should consider identifying the right contacts in government agencies and increasing access to them.
- **Include “plain language” descriptions of laws and regulations**, that are current and written by credible authorities.
- **Provide a powerful search engine** that identifies the right resources based on queries, **and organize information and searches around compliance problems and issues businesses face** rather than around agencies and regulations.
- **Improve the capability for locating and submitting forms** by enhancing forms.gov (e.g., provide more powerful search capabilities, add summaries to the search results).



## 7. Recommendations (Continued)

### A Pyramid Model of Government\*



\*Adapted from Parasuraman's Pyramid Model of Marketing; see *Techno-Ready Marketing: How and Why Your Customers Adopt Technology*, A. Parasuraman and Charles L. Colby, Free Press, 2001.





## 7. Recommendations Usability Enhancements

6. **Introduce customization/personalization capabilities** to allow users to filter out the information that is not relevant to them. This might include the following enhancements:
  - Provide the ability to store business-specific profiles that customize the portal to users' specific information needs.
  - **Proactively tell businesses what they need to know**, and what is new and important in the regulatory area (i.e., via email notification)
7. **Ensure quality of site content.** BG should implement quality assurance standards with respect to the content's credibility of source, depth, and relevance.
8. **Allow users to rate their satisfaction with different areas of the site.**
  - Usability testing would be insufficient in capturing all the details of where room for improvement lies; BG should use a simple feedback form on the site that links the feedback to the page and search parameters.



## 7. Recommendations

### Next Steps

- ➔ **Conduct quantitative research.** These findings should be used to identify decision points, which should be validated in a structured, quantitative survey.
- ➔ **Maintain ongoing dialogue with business community stakeholders.** This research has initiated a dialogue with businesses and associations interested in the relations between business and government; these stakeholders should be enlisted to provide feedback on an ongoing basis.

